

BROOKLINE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
12TH ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST
FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2016
8:30-10:30 AM

Participants:

Brookline School Committee Members: Ms. Susan Wolf Ditkoff, Chairman; Ms. Barbara Scotto, Vice Chairman; Ms. Helen Charlupski; Mr. David Pollak; and Ms. Rebecca Stone. School Committee members absent: Mr. P.H. Benjamin Chang; Mr. Michael Glover; Dr. Lisa, Jackson; and Ms. Beth Jackson Stram.

Legislators:

Senator Cynthia Creem; Representative Edward Coppinger; Representative Frank Smizik; Ms. Catherine Anderson, Senator Creem's Legislative Director; Ms. Lisa Sears, Senator Creem's Policy Counsel; Ms. Sarah Sabshon, Representative Sánchez's Chief of Staff; Mr. Collin Fedor, Representative Sánchez's Legislative Aide; and Mr. Nicholas Hutchings, Representative Smizik's Research Director.

Brookline Schools Administration:

Dr. Joseph Connelly, Interim Superintendent; Dr. Jennifer Fischer-Mueller, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning; Dr. Karen Shmukler, Deputy Superintendent for Student Services; Ms. Mary Ellen Dunn, Deputy Superintendent for Administration and Finance; Mr. Ben Lummis, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Strategy and Performance; Mr. Michael D'Onofrio, Director of Administrative Services; and Ms. Robin Coyne, School Committee Executive Assistant.

Brookline Board of Selectmen:

Ms. Nancy Daly.

Brookline Advisory Committee School Subcommittee:

Mr. Michael Sandman, Ms. Bobbie Knable, and Ms. Shaari Mittel.

Ms. Ditkoff welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. The participants introduced themselves.

Ms. Stone reviewed the Brookline School Committee Legislative Priorities for 2016 (Attachment A).

The Public Schools of Brookline vision of an outstanding education for every child is challenged by the district's unchecked enrollment growth over the past decade. A successful Prop 2 ½ override and debt exclusion in spring 2015 allows us to begin to catch up to that growth with responsive staffing of schools and important changes to administrative structure. The Devotion School expansion and renovation is moving forward, and plans for a new ninth elementary school are being pressure tested in the community. Brookline has a Statement of Interest before the MSBA to enter feasibility for our current priority: expansion of capacity at Brookline High School, where we anticipate growing from today's 1900 students to some 2600 in the next six years.

Our administrative and senior staff is also in transition. We have a new Deputy Superintendent for Administration and Finance, a new Human Resources Director, and an interim Superintendent as we search for our next educational leader. We are also searching for new building leadership (principals) at four of our elementary schools.

None of that context changes our desire to move legislation or change funding formulas that would help with our ability to move forward toward our vision. With appreciation for the delegation's help and support for the PSB and our students, the Brookline School Committee reaffirms its interest in and commitment to the following legislation:

1. Circuit Breaker Transportation Reform & Trigger

Special education transportation costs Brookline approximately \$1 million annually. Along with the burden of medically mandated services (see #4), spending for high-cost special education and its related transportation costs represent the largest unfunded mandates in our budget. We thank our legislators (especially Rep. Smizik and Sen. Creem) for continuing to raise this issue and hope we can count on this delegation to support those bills that address this longstanding inequity, in particular adding transportation to the Circuit Breaker formula and lowering the "trigger" for reimbursement to 3x the regular student cost.

2. Sustaining METCO

One of the core strengths of our schools has been our investment in greater racial diversity through the METCO program. State funding for METCO has been essential to maintaining that commitment, and we are very grateful for the delegation's leadership on METCO, especially the efforts of Sen. Creem and Rep. Sanchez last year. METCO's place in Brookline was questioned during last year's override debate when public support narrowed for this and other "non-resident" programs. Without robust state funding – for example, a match with the school "choice" reimbursement level – we expect to see a return of such debates more frequently.

3. Mandate Relief

Each year we discuss the growing pressure on our budget, our administrators, and our educators from federal and state mandates to implement new curriculum, programs, or services. Yet each year, new mandates are added by the legislature, most without associated funding. The growing list including Common Core Testing, Educator Evaluation, English Language Immersion and related teacher training (RETELL), Bullying Prevention, school safety legislation, and most recently restraint training and mandated sex education. While the BSC supports many of these initiatives in principle, legislated curricular or training mandates affect both administrative and teaching staff, and have become issues for us in collective bargaining as teachers seek relief from the additional pressures on their time.

4. Health Insurance Coverage for Medically Necessary Treatment in School

We appreciate the delegation's willingness to work with us on this issue in past sessions, and realize the obstacles to progress. But, as we have reviewed for several years, approximately 1.4% of Brookline students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have

high-cost, medically mandated services included. The PSB spends \$1.1 million per year for in- and out-of-district costs associated with those medically fragile students. We urge you to continue pressing for legislation to shift those costs to private health insurance.

5. *We also reaffirm our support for the following:*

- *Revising the Foundation Budget to reflect real costs*
- *Limiting tuition increases at out-of-district private schools for special needs*
- *Funding for true Universal Pre-K and Full-day Kindergarten*

6. *Although the School Committee was divided over H340 (the proposed moratorium on high stakes use of standardized tests), we unanimously endorsed the attached statement on standardized testing. The statement reflects the deep concern of this committee about educational equity and the need to continue making progress, not just in Brookline but across the Commonwealth, and our belief that assessments of student learning play an important role in those efforts. We hope there might be some willingness to add language to H340 directly addressing these points, which we believe would strengthen the legislation.*

Dr. Connelly provided a report on school enrollment and how it is driving the need for additional space at the elementary and high school levels (Attachment B). Our projections indicate that enrollment will continue to increase, in part because of new housing development. We received a letter in December notifying us that our Brookline High School CORE Program Statement of Interest (SOI) was not selected to be invited into the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) eligibility period at this time. The School Committee will be deciding whether to submit a CORE Program SOI to the MSBA for either the Brookline High School or a 9th elementary school in 2016. The Legislators asked to be updated on the status of the SOI(s). School Committee members noted the impact of class size on teaching and learning.

The Legislators stated that they share our priorities and offered their support. They provided an update on current issues/developments at the State House. A Budget Review Commission released a report that recommended adjustments to the funding formula that would increase Chapter 70 funding. No funding source was identified. Charter School funding and whether to lift the cap continue to be a focus. There is a ballot initiative that would allow the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to authorize up to 12 new charter schools or expansions of existing schools each year - giving preference to applications from the state's lowest performing school districts and districts with significant charter school waiting lists. Senate Bill 326 calls for a moratorium on charter schools. If the cap is lifted, we need a funding commitment to protect Chapter 70 funding for traditional schools. There is not enough money in the state budget to do what we need to do in education. Gaming revenue has not been as high as anticipated. There is not enough money to do everything, so the state is reluctant to add new initiatives. The insurance companies oppose shifting the cost of medically necessary treatment in schools to private health insurance. There is concern that premiums will rise if insurers are required to pay for more services. Health care is in a state of transition. Representative Scibak is leading an effort to increase the early

education work force (\$31 million). Representative Sánchez has filed legislation that would provide districts more flexibility in providing English Language Learners (ELL) programs. A House Bill to address the opioid epidemic passed last week. Unlike the Senate bill, it does not mandate school screenings, but does require districts to create a plan. School Committee members and administrators expressed support for the objective, but noted the impact of unfunded mandates on districts. The Legislators talked about competing needs. People want the government to provide expanded services, be fiscally responsible, and not increase taxes.

Dr. Fischer-Mueller provided an update on discussions at the state level on curriculum frameworks and standardized testing (state is finalizing new science curriculum frameworks; proposal to institute a Social Studies MCAS component, which would be very content heavy; looking to see how the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will be implemented in Massachusetts).

Ms. Stone and Ms. Ditkoff thanked everyone for coming and for their continued support.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 AM.